

Special Supplement

Art & Design : Department of Films & Publications (DFP) ♦ Assistance : Press Information Department (PID), Ministry of Information




 PRESIDENT
 PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF
 BANGLADESH

Message

On the occasion of the great 'Shaheed Day (Martyrs Day)' and 'International Mother Language Day 2021', I extend my warm congratulations and sincere felicitations to the people and ethnic groups of different languages of the world along with Bangla-speaking people. It is a unique celebration in protecting mother tongue as well as own culture and heritage.

The great Language Movement is a memorable event in our national history. Today, I remember with profound respect, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who led Sarbodhio Rashtrabhasa Sangram Parishad (All Party State Language Action Committee), formed in 1948 and was imprisoned. I would like to recall all the language activists including the then Member of Gonoparishad (Constituent Assembly) Dharendra Nath Dutta, whose foresightedness, boundless sacrifice, courage, organizational skills and instantaneous decision making resulted in the final outcome of the language movement on February 21, 1952 and consequently, the Bangalee achieved their right to the mother tongue. I pay deep homage to the language martyrs namely Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Jabbar, Shafiur and many unknown and unsung language heroes who laid down their lives for the cause of mother tongue Bangla.


The aim of the language movement was to establish the right of our mother tongue as well as to protect our ethnicity, self-identity and cultural distinction. Being a source of ceaseless inspiration, Amar Ekushey (Immortal Shaheed Day) inspired and encouraged us to a great extent to achieve the right to self-determination, struggle for freedom and war of liberation. With the bloodshed passages of Language Movement of February, we achieved the recognition of Bangla as our mother tongue and consequently, we attained our long-cherished independence under the charismatic leadership of the greatest Bangalee of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In fact, embracing martyrdom for the cause of mother tongue is a rare incident in world history. February 21 has now been recognized by the United Nations as the 'International Mother Language Day' with the spontaneous willingness and sincere endeavour of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina along with the primary efforts of some Bangladeshi expatriates in 1999. As the Bangalee nation, it is also a great achievement for us.

Many languages in the world are now at the risk of extinction. Extinction of a language means disappearance of a culture, a nation and a civilization from the face of the earth. Therefore the world must raise the voice for protecting the language and culture of all ethnic groups, including the development of respective mother tongue and culture. International Mother Language Institute, an institute for the research and preservation of the flourishing and nearly extinct languages of the world, has been established in Dhaka in 2001. Besides, textbooks and teaching methods have also been introduced for the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities in our country with a view to protecting and developing their own languages and culture. At the same time, in the development of the Bengali language for which we have sacrificed our lives, emphasis should be laid on the introduction of pure Bangla at all levels. I firmly believe that observing the International Mother Language Day will play a positive role in the development and preservation of our own language as well as in building a sustainable future through multilingual education.

The spirit of Amar Ekushey is now the incessant source of inspiration for the protection of own languages and culture of peoples of different languages in the world. Imbued with the spirit of Amar Ekushey, let the bond of friendship among multilingual people be strengthened, world's almost defunct languages be revived and the globe be diversified in respective societies- it is my expectation on Shaheed Day and International Mother Language Day.

Joi Bangla.
 Khoda Hafez, May Bangladesh Live Forever.


 Md. Abdul Hamid



For Ekushey All These Tears and Verse
 Mahadev Saha

For Ekushey all these tears and verse,
 Millions of roses blooming in no moment,
 Love flowering in bosoms

For Ekushey this sky with anguish,
 Thirteen hundred rivers rippling with stormy waves,
 White dewdrops of morning, groaning in Ramna ground

For Ekushey this festivity of alphabet, endless lines of verse
 Martyr's monument decked with circlets of flowers

For Ekushey these nightlong mourning marches,
 Morning tunes sung by everyone
 These flowers and tears, silent weeping of wakeful birds nightlong

For Ekushey is this Mother Language Day,
 Bangla spreading worldwide
 This tale of glory and
 This victory flag held in every hand

For Ekushey this chorus of courage in millions of hearts rising
 Processions for freedom on all streets resounding,
 For Ekushey these full-throated words,
 For Ekushey this soulful love spreading unending

Translated by Mohammad Nurul Huda



Contributions of Ekushey:
 At Home and Abroad
 Ahmad Rafiq

The language movement demanding Bangla as state language had commenced from the year 1947 – even before Pakistan was born by partitioning India through an orderly process. Even at that time, the Muslim League leaders were repeatedly uttering the same thing: the only state language of future Pakistan shall be Urdu, and no other language. At that juncture, a few Muslim teachers-journalists-writers spoke and wrote in favour of Bangla as the principal state language in a logical fashion by gathering enough courage. They included Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah, Abdul Haque, Dr. Quazi Motahar Hossain, Dr. Muhammad Enamul Haque, Dr. Abul Quasem, et al.

After crossing this preliminary or theoretical phase, a massive movement was launched from March 1948 that lasted up to 1950. Then its huge nationalistic contour found expression in February 1952, when the movement for state language was transformed into a complete language movement. The slogan was then not limited to merely the state language. Various slogans were raised everywhere in the country (province of East Bengal) at that time: "We want state language Bangla; we seek release of political prisoners; introduce Bangla at all levels (of national life)".

Just as the first slogan indicated a nation-state, the second slogan reflected the demand for democratic rights; and the third one expressed a nationalistic spirit for establishing mother-language and state-language Bangla at all levels of national life including in higher education, higher courts, etc. Just as the colloquial language coming out of a mother's mouth or the mother-language consolidates the linguistic and nationalistic emotions of a people around their homeland through exchange of ideas, composition of literature, etc., similarly the potential for creating a nation-state based on a state language becomes a certainty through relating it with livelihoods.

The state language movement became and took the shape of a nationalistic language movement after reaching the Ekushey (21 February) episode of 1952. Its mutuality and autonomous character become clearer if the social-cultural-political aspects of language are considered. Its negative aspect like 'racial pride' may be contrary to humanistic spirit, but the nationalistic ethos and nation-building become inevitable by the urge for establishing the self and bringing about economic prosperity of the people. Class consciousness occasionally concedes defeat in such situations. It retreats. Such examples are visible in many countries of the world.

In fact, Ekushey became the seed-bed for nationalistic spirit and a future nation-state based on language. This path was never smooth; it was strewn with unwanted complexities. Because of the divisive policies of British rule in India and its agricultural policy in Bengal, the Bengali Muslims were lagging behind in education and socio-economic status not only in comparison to their neighbours from the Hindu community, they were also behind compared to the Muslims of northern and western India. Studies of researchers from northern India like Irfan Habib offer proof of that. Places ranging from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh to Bombay, Punjab and Gujarat provide proof of that as well.

Naturally, the Bengali Muslims suffered from an inferiority complex. Therefore, the distinct world of Jinnah's politics of separateness (Pakistan) appeared to them to be attractive and a realm of dream in their quest for self-development and self-assertion. They took time before they could disentangle themselves from this unwanted politics. This journey led to the bath of freedom after reaching the decade of 1950s. Prior to the partition, Pakistan became a land of dreams for the Bengali Muslims. The central political leaders of Pakistan starting from Jinnah to Liaquat took advantage of their infinite liberality. The provincial election of 1946 bore testimony that the backdrop for establishment of Pakistan was laid through the votes of the Bengali Muslims. They cast their votes collectively in the ballot box of the Muslim League. With the exception of two seats won by Fazlul Haque, all other seats were captured by the Muslim League.

But the election results in Muslim-majority western India were different and mixed. Anti-Muslim League cabinets were formed in Punjab and the frontier province. In Sind, the league could painstakingly form the cabinet only with the support from the European bloc. To cut it short, it was the Bengali Muslims who created the real setting for the establishment of Pakistan.

And after the founding of Pakistan, West Pakistan devoured all the honeys with the blessings of the Urdu-speaking central leadership due to the infinite liberality of Bangla Muslims. Instead of Dhaka, at first Karachi became the capital of Pakistan. Later, the capital was shifted to Rawalpindi and finally to Islamabad by spending a huge amount of money. Dhaka was not even conferred the honour of an alternative capital.

Most of the loans and grants from British and American foreign aid were spent in different towns of West Pakistan, in development programs like building various types of industrial zones and modernisation of Karachi port. But Chittagong Port remained the same as before. The Urdu-speaking non-Bangalis were the owners of jute and textile mills in East Bengal. A huge socio-economic disparity was built up between the east and west over the years. The students and youths were the main driving force in the 1946 election and the Pakistan Movement. The demand for Pakistan reached the general masses due to their tireless labour and the campaign of the Muslim League. The demand became universal everywhere. The driving forces behind the language movement that brought an end to this political character were again the conscious students and youths. Through their toils, ideals and self-sacrifices, the multidimensional demands for language (recall the slogan) and the movement of Ekushey spread from Teknaf to Tentulia, from Chatmohar to Meherpur, that is from north to south, from east to west, up to the villages. This was mainly centred in the educational institutions. The movement assumed a universal character, but was quite the reverse of 1946. It clearly followed a non-communal, liberal-democratic, progressive and nationalistic trend.

As pre-partition character of politics underwent transformation, the state-language movement (1948-52), especially that of Ekushey, was founded on linguistic nationalism. The infinite courage and bravery of the students-youths and masses was expressed at one stage of this movement.

The Dhaka administration imposed section-144 in Dhaka city on 20 February 1952 afternoon in order to thwart the program announced by the students and youths for 21 February. As the carrot of election was hung before them, the politician-dominated All-Party State-Language Action Council adopted a resolution against breaking the section-144, although the main segment of the student-youth leadership as well as the general students did not accept that. They were determined to observe the declared program at any cost, even by breaking section-144.

With that objective, the students assembled at the arts building compound of Dhaka University in the morning of 21 February by sticking to their unwavering stand. Then the small processions of ten students at a time went out towards the medical college hostel compound by breaking section-144 amid baton-charges and tear-gas shells fired by the police.

An extraordinary event took place at noon on that day. The police opened fire on the students and masses, who were chanting slogans on the hostel compound after failing to break the strong police barricade. Rafiq-Jabbar-Barkat et al embraced martyrdom as a result. The day later became marked as the Martyrs' Day. The whole province including Dhaka city became tumultuous in protest against the incident. That included an amazing protest of red and white in Dhaka, which was also participated by the inhabitants of Old Dhaka.

Dhaka became a city of processions on 22 February. A new slogan 'May the martyrs' memory become immortal' was added to the old ones. The politically inclined students of Dhaka Medical College built a martyrs' monument having 10-feet height and 6-feet width by putting in night-long labour on their hostel compound. That beloved monument of the Dhaka city-dwellers was broken by the police in the afternoon of its very inaugural day on 26 February; and all its bricks were also taken away.

But a martyrs' monument cannot die, just as the linguistic spirit of humans remains undying in their minds. Meanwhile, martyrs' monuments were built at all places from Rajshahi to Narail town, even on the compounds of rural schools, through the efforts of students and youths. Later on, efforts were also made through government initiative to construct a central martyrs' monument (Shaheed Minar) that underwent building, breaking and rebuilding process. Finally, the present martyrs' monument came into being by modifying the original design. But it did not capture the original design of Hamidur Rahman and the sculpture of Novera Ahmed.

The language movement and Ekushey have presented two permanent and vitally important symbols to the nation, the country (People's Republic of Bangladesh) and the government. The first one is the 'Ekushey February' that could materialise due to the self-sacrifices of the martyrs; and the second one is the 'Shaheed Minar' (martyrs' monument). The nation bows its head in reverence at least once a year not only at the Central Shaheed Minar, but also before numerous martyrs' monuments of various shapes (small and large) built all over the country.

Emanating from the memory of self-sacrifices of the martyrs, the 21st February has been recognised on the one hand as an occasion of grief, and on the other hand as an inspiration for protests and democratic movements. The day involves a memorial procession from the Shaheed Minar as well as afternoon gatherings. The whole country observes the day from the first hours of midnight as a national holiday.

The martyrs' monument is not something different in this respect. It's symbolic significance covers sorrow for the martyrs, abhorrence of any despotic regime, protests, and above all an inspiration for democratic movements. At the same time, it remains as a fountain of cultural pursuits.

Another glorious contribution of the language movement has been the declaration of Ekushey as the 'International Mother Language Day', which is a matter of pride for all Bangla-speaking people. The primary credit for this goes to two expatriate Bangladeshis named Rafiqul Islam and Abdus Salam Naser. At the same time, credit goes to the then Awami League government, especially the efforts of education minister A S H K Sadeq and eminent Bangladeshi diplomat Syed Muzzeem Ali. The declaration came on 17 November 1999 from the 30th annual meeting of UNESCO.

The contributions of the language movement and Ekushey (1952) has remained a matter of pride for us all in this way, although its important slogan 'Introduce Bangla at all levels' has not materialised yet. The royal language of colonial era – English – still prevails in many fields including higher education and higher courts. The mother language Bangla lags far behind in that area and in fact is still neglected in practice. The only exception is the domain of literature and culture.

The concluding remarks in this monologue would be that the greatest contribution of the language movement has been an independent Bangladesh that could emerge by treading the path of blood-drenched nationalistic spirit, strong winds for self-rule through the 6-point and 11-point demands, the mass upsurge of 1969, and the liberation war of 1971.




 PRIME MINISTER
 GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S
 REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

Message

On the occasion of the great Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day, I extend my sincere greetings to the people of all languages and cultures of the world, including Bangla. UNESCO has been celebrating this day with due dignity since 2000 with Bangladesh. Like every year, they have set a theme for this day 'Fostering multilingualism for inclusion in education and society', which I think is very timely.

The importance of the language movement in the history of the Bangla liberation struggle is immense. Through this movement, the foundation for the inception of a non-communal, democratic, language-based nation/state system was laid. On this day in 1952, Abul Barkat, Abdul Jabbar, Abdus Salam, Rafiquddin Ahmad, Shafiur Rahman and many others sacrificed their lives to protect the dignity of our mother language Bangla. Today, I pay my deep tributes to the memory of the martyrs of all languages, including Bangla. I remember with the utmost respect all the language heroes, including the greatest Bangla of all time, Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who led the struggle for the dignity of the Bangla language, whose visionary historical decisions and supreme sacrifices have saved the existence of our mother, land, and people.

The turbulent days of the language movement in the glorious historical records of the Bangla from 1947 to 1952 have been serving as a source of inspiration in our national life from time and again. Behind every achievement in the protection of the interests of the peace-loving people of this region lies the history of blood-shedding struggle and the sacrifices of countless lives. The Father of the Nation has been repeatedly imprisoned for leading the language movement. At the Education Conference held in Karachi on 27 November 1947, a recommendation was accepted to make Urdu the state language of Pakistan. When the news reached Dhaka, the students of Dhaka University immediately protested in front of Khawaja Nazimuddin's residence. Shortly afterward, Sheikh Mujib, a law student of Dhaka University, used his organizational experience to play a very key role in the establishment of the Chhatra League in Dhaka on 4 January 1948. In the first session of the Constituent Assembly on 23 February, Dharendra Nath Datta of Comilla moved an amendment proposal demanding the inclusion of Bangla as the language of the Assembly. Rejecting the proposal, Khawaja Nazimuddin declared in the Legislative Assembly that the people of East Bengal would accept Urdu as the state language. But to counter the reckless decision of Nazimuddin, an all-party Chhatra Sangram Parishad was formed on 2 March at Fazlul Haque Hall of Dhaka University comprising Chhatra League, Tamaddun Majlish and other parties. Many language heroes, including Sheikh Mujib, were arrested in front of the Secretariat for leading the strike on 11 March and were released on 15 March. The day after their release, on 16 March, the students again besieged the provincial council building under the leadership of Sheikh Mujib, and many were injured by police baton charges. On 21 March, Jinnah spoke out boastfully against the Bangla language and in favor of Urdu at the Dhaka Racecourse Ground. When Urdu was declared the state language of Pakistan at the students' convocation on 24 March at Curzon Hall, the students immediately protested.

To transform the language movement into a national campaign, Sheikh Mujib organized a nationwide tour plan and participated in a massive campaign, and addressed rallies. He was arrested from Faridpur on 11 September and released on 21 January 1949. He was arrested again on 19 April and released in July. He was arrested on 14 October 1949 and released on 27 February 1952. Undoubtedly, Sheikh Mujib had been in touch with language heroes and Chhatra League leaders from 1st January 1950, in Dhaka Central Jail and had given various suggestions to add momentum to the movement. He sent news through three messengers on 3 February called for a nationwide strike on 21 February and marching around the meeting venue of the executive council. That announcement was made after the students' procession on 4 February. When Sheikh Mujib declared a hunger strike at this stage, on 16 February the jail authorities transferred him from Dhaka to Faridpur Jail.

The budget session of the East Bengal Executive Council was scheduled for 21 February 1952. On the advice and instructions of Sheikh Mujib, a general strike was called all over the country on that day. To deal with the situation, the Muslim League government had issued Section 144 for one month in Dhaka city from 20 February and banned all kinds of meetings, rallies, processions, etc. Students gathered at Dhaka University violated Section 144 and when the police fired indiscriminately, some lives were lost in the blink of an eye, many were injured and many were arrested. Several members of the provincial council walked out of the session room. The next day, on 22 February, a spontaneous strike was observed in Dhaka. The government called for the army, imposed curfew, and the Bangla language resolution was passed in the provincial assembly.

On 8 March 1954, the Awami League-led United Front won the election with the boat symbol. Awami League members started pressuring to make Bangla the state language. Meanwhile, on 30 May, the Governor of Pakistan dissolved the United Front cabinet by issuing Section 92(a). All the leaders including Sheikh Mujib were arrested. In 1956, the Awami League reconstituted the cabinet, gave Bangla the status of the state language, declared 21st February as Martyr's Day, and declared it a public holiday. The same government took up the first projects to build the Shaheed Minar, publish literary and science books from the Bangla Academy and invent Bangla typewriters. Unfortunately, with the imposition of military rule on 7 October 1958, those aspirations were no longer fulfilled.

In independent Bangladesh, the Father of the Nation directed the use of Bangla in all official activities. He made Bangla the state language in the constitution. He delivered a speech at the United Nations in Bangla and placed our mother language to a dignified position in the world assembly. During the 1996-2001 term of our government, Rafiq and Salam, two Bangladeshi expatriates from Canada, along with some members of the international community formed the 'Mother Language Preservation Committee'. They sent a proposal to the United Nations to celebrate International Mother Language Day on 21st February. Since the UN does not take cognizance of any personal proposal, they suggested sending the proposal to UNESCO from the state. When we knew, we did not have much time: we contacted the Committee for the Preservation of the Mother Language and sent our proposal to UNESCO through a quick fax message on 9 October 1999, while we had to decide within 24 hours. We seek the supports of member states through our embassies. As a result, on 17 November 1999, UNESCO recognized 21st February as 'International Mother Language Day'. We have established the International Mother Language Institute. We have taken initiatives to preserve endangered languages and protect their dignity. We have ensured the use of the Bangla language in the ICT. We have introduced textbooks for ethnic groups in five languages at the primary level. We are trying to get Bangla recognized as the official language of the United Nations. A particular group of people is found always active in demigrating the contribution of the Father of the Nation in the flourishing of Bangla identity and establishing the dignity of the Bangla language. With the publication of the Unfinished Memoire of the Father of the Nation and the Secret Documents of Intelligence Branch of Pakistan, it has been possible to frustrate all such malpractices.

Based on a particular spirit, we have established the right to language and on the same spirit, we have achieved our independence. In the last 12 years, we have made tremendous progress in every area of the socio-economic sector of the country, embracing that particular ethos and the logos of the Father of the Nation. Bangladesh is a role model of development in the world today. We are celebrating the year 2020-21 as 'Mujib Year'. Next month we will celebrate the golden jubilee of independence. We have prepared the second perspective plan, 2021-2041 for the next 20 years period and have adopted the 8th Five Year Plan. Insha Allah, soon we will establish the developed, prosperous and non-communal 'Golden Bangladesh' as per the dream of the Father of the Nation.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
 May Bangladesh Live Forever.


 Sheikh Hasina

What was gained included a new flag, a new map, an extraordinary constitution, and a single state-language Bangla mandated by the constitution. Bangla is now the state language of the republic.

But the introduction of Bangla at all strata of national life has not yet materialised. That is, the royal language of colonial era – English – still prevails in higher education, science education and higher courts. The self-conscious Bangalis, who waged struggles for their language, still wait for the use of state language in accordance with the constitution in all strata of their lives.

Writer : Vetem Language activist
 Translation: Dr. Helal Uddin Ahmed