

Special Supplement

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



Message  
08 Falgun 1429  
21 February 2023

Today is 21 February, The great 'Shaheed Day (Martyrs Day)' and 'International Mother Language Day'. On this memorable day, I recall Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Jabbar, Shafiq and many anonymous language martyrs with deep homage who laid down their lives to establish the right of mother tongue Bangla. On the occasion of International Mother Language Day 2023, I extend my sincere greetings and congratulations to the people of various languages of the world including Bangla and other ethnic groups.

The great Language Movement is an unforgettable event in our national history. Today, I remember with profound respect, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who led *Sarbojito Kshirohusha Sangram Parishad* (All Party State Language Action Committee), formed in 1948 and consequently was imprisoned. I recall all the language activists including the then Member of *Gonparishad* (Constituent Assembly) Dharendra Nath Dutta, whose foresightedness, boundless sacrifice, courage, organizational skills and instantaneous decision resulted in the final outcome of the language movement on February 21, 1952 and consequently, Bangladesh achieved their right of mother tongue.

In 1947, on the basis of Two Nation Theory, the British-ruled India was split into two countries- India and Pakistan. With thousand kilometers apart, East and West Pakistan had completely different languages and cultures. Therefore, when Urdu was declared as the only state language of Pakistan, the Bangalee Nation took to the streets in protest to protect the status of their mother tongue 'Bangla'. Basically the Language Movement was the movement to establish the right of our mother tongue as well as to protect our ethnicity, self-identity and cultural distinction. The imperishable spirit of *Amar Ekushey* (Immortal Shaheed Day) gave us endless inspiration and immense courage in achieving our rights to self-determination, struggle for freedom and the 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 in 1971 under the charismatic leadership of the greatest Bangalee of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

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 one of the great achievements for us. It is a unique celebration in protecting mother tongue as well as own culture and heritage.

The spirit of *Amar Ekushey* is now the incessant source of inspiration for protecting own languages and culture of peoples of different languages in the world. But we have to be more diligent in proper practice and preservation of Bengali language and culture. With the blessings of information technology, we are now the inhabitants of a single global village. Therefore, to maintain pace of advancement with the developed world, our present generation has to attain necessary skills in different languages which are recognized as international communication media. I 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 - this is our expectation.

Embracing the spirit of *Amar Ekushey*, let mutual respect be awakened among the people of different languages and cultures of the world, let a colorful world without discrimination be developed - it is my expectation on Shaheed Day and International Mother Language Day.

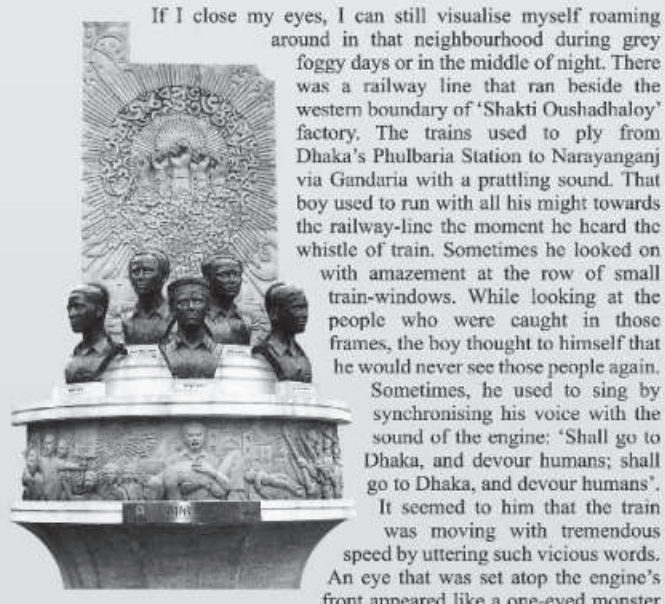
Joi Bangla.  
Khoda Hafez, May Bangladesh Live Forever.

Md. Abdul Hamid

A Slice of Ekush in the Sky of Memory  
Abed Khan

ONE

Let me start this write-up with a childhood memory. It was many years ago, at the beginning of 1950s. I was then a child of about six or seven years. While dwelling on the topic, I should mention that I may not be able to identify the house of Number-25 Basubazar Lane if I look at it now. The picture that was originally ingrained in my heart does not resemble the Basubazar Lane of today. I have witnessed my childhood, adolescence and the incomparable affluence of a wild, lively youth from that house of Basubazar Lane.



If I close my eyes, I can still visualise myself roaming around in that neighbourhood during grey foggy days or in the middle of night. There was a railway line that ran beside the western boundary of 'Shakti Oushadhalay' factory. The trains used to ply from Dhaka's Phulbaria Station to Narayanganj via Gandaria with a rattling sound. That boy used to run with all his might towards the railway-line the moment he heard the whistle of train. Sometimes he looked on with amazement at the row of small train-windows. While looking at the people who were caught in those frames, the boy thought to himself that he would never see those people again. Sometimes, he used to sing by synchronising his voice with the sound of the engine: 'Shall go to Dhaka, and devour humans; shall go to Dhaka, and devour humans'. It seemed to him that the train was moving with tremendous speed by uttering such vicious words. An eye that was set atop the engine's front appeared like a one-eyed monster mentioned in the tale of Sindbad. There was a chimney on its neck, and black smoke of coal gushed out of it and flew in the opposite direction; the smoke then faded by spreading in all directions. Following the departure of the train, that boy used to touch the rail-line to gauge its temperature generated by friction. He put his ear on the line to listen to the train's rattling sound for estimating its distance from the spot. He had so many games to play on the railway-line, such as, counting the number of lines he walked on; arranging pieces of rocks on the lines to test the accuracy of his hand in hitting; occasionally determining the train's speed by holding a finger before his eyes! I heard that dead people used to be thrown out of the train's doors during the riot of 1950s after they were cut to pieces. It was said that the skeletons of those people could be found in the jungles adjacent to the rail-lines. We had a 'Jyatha-moshai' (elder uncle) in our neighbourhood. The shop of Brajahari used to stand exactly opposite to our Number-25 Basubazar residence. I shall return to the subject of Brajahari later on. Let me now dwell on Jyatha-moshai.

He had spherical spectacles on his eyes. His eyes seemed to be popping out from the other side through the heavy glasses; he had white prickly beards, a bald head, and almost empty row of teeth. His skin appeared to be hanging from his body; there were clear signs of poverty on the facial marks; he had a burnt physique and his dress (dhoti or loin-cloth) was raised up to the knee. He used to make broom-sticks by cutting bamboo. Then those were tied with strings. I used to visit this Jyatha-moshai almost every noon. I used to go there by avoiding the mid-day naps and evading the eyes of elders in the house. He used to live in the outer room of the single-storey skeletal red house beside Brajahari's shop. Jyatha-moshai could tell stories accompanied by physical gestures. Sometimes the stories were of tigers, sometimes of ghosts, and sometimes of kings. How wonderfully he narrated the tales of Ramayana and Mahabharata! It seemed to me that I could see everything before my eyes: Rama was going for an exile of fourteen years, Dasharatha was becoming sick, Manthara was whispering into the ears of Kaikeyi. I could also visualise the game of Pasha played by Shokuni Mama, the chariot-ride of Arjuna, Sri Krishna Sarathi. This Jyatha-moshai also spoke about the rail-line: none should walk over this line alone at night! Those who died after being over-run by train, or those who died due to fatal accidents walked at night on those railway lines! I was quite thrilled when Jyatha-moshai narrated his tales.

When the times declined on the shoulder of evenings after crossing noon and afternoons, Jyatha-moshai appeared to me to be one of those who roamed at night on the railway line. My physique used to freeze out of fear, but I still



IMMORTAL EKUSHEY

Martyrs' Day  
&  
International Mother Language Day

went to him due to a strange attraction. Smilingly, he made me sit by his side whenever I went. There was arrangement for cooking on the back-side of that house. There were various types of boxes, bottles, tins, jars, and many other things at that place! Jyatha-moshai used to bring two 'Batasha' (sweets) for me from there. If there were no sweets, then he used to put at least some sugar on my palm. Then after talking about different things, he used to enter the kingdom of stories at some point. I shall return to the subject of Jyatha-moshai later on. Now it is the turn of Brajahari's shop.

Maybe Brajahari's shop did not have numerous commodities. But many goods were also available there. I was never concerned about all the items. My eyes used to focus only on the rows of jars in front. They contained lozenges, sweets, and a type of Sandesh (sweetmeat made from posset). They tasted wonderful. While opening his shop in the morning, Brajahari used to scatter a basket of puffed rice on the road and rooftop of the shop, and called in a melodious voice - Come, come... Then a flock of crows would come down. The more the gathering of crows, the more would there be customers on the day. Brajahari's shop was inaugurated daily with such a weird belief. My childhood and adolescent days began by witnessing such scenes routinely on a daily basis.

Our home was dreadfully silent one morning in February. We were reading our textbooks as in every other day. Mother and aunts were sitting on the compound to slice vegetables for cooking. The males had gone out of the house. Father went to office, the brothers to their work. I was playing with the wheels of a cycle. What was the time then? Hardly 11 or 11.30 a.m.! The elders in the house were discussing during the previous night that something terrible might happen on the following day. Therefore, none should travel to town. But nobody heeded that warning after father had gone to office. News came towards 11.30 a.m. Shots were fired at the students on the university campus. Everybody's face went pale. People were worried about those who had gone out. There was no way one could know. Nobody told me about the firing; I was also not of that age. I was only guessing by looking at others' faces. I did not know who had passed on that information. I only saw the shadows of anxiety and sorrow on those faces. Mother told me: Don't do anything naughty, and don't venture outside the house. I was also cautioned that the police might take me away if I went out. There were thousands of questions in my mind: Why would the police take me away, why should they fire? How did the police look like? I was earlier told about the appearances of the police - they wore khaki half-pant and half-shirt; they had round and red eyes below thick and dense eyebrows; they had caps on the head. Father used to say, the police would severely beat up those who were naughty. After that, I could easily be made to keep quiet by citing the peril of the police. But at that juncture, innumerable questions were being raised inside my head: Why did the police fire? Were the students doing anything naughty? All inhabitants of the house were conversing with a serious face, and I was trying to find answers to my questions by looking at their mouths.

Many people from the neighbourhood then arrived at our house in search of news. One of my maternal uncles (mama) suddenly came in. He was also carrying the news of firing. The vague words that were circulating around till then finally took a concrete shape. Getting tired, my mama sat down on the steps and sought a glass of water. There was excitement among the females in the household. Some brought water for him. Some brought sweets made of puffed rice on a plate. I was listening to them while driving a wheel on the compound. I could gather that the police were not allowing the students to come out on the roads. But the police opened fire when the students did not obey their order; some were even taken away. After this, the vehicles stopped plying on the roads; many people brought out processions. I was looking at the faces, and a strange pain was piling up inside me. Why should the police open fire? Won't the person shot get killed! Why should he die? While telling me a story a few days ago, one of my brothers told me that the students wanted to speak in Bangla, call their mothers 'ma'; the police were angry with them because of that. I asked myself: What should I do? I could not speak any other language; and could not call my mother in any other way. Without knowing the details, it seemed to me that the students were doing the right thing; but I was not old enough then to judge what was right, or what was wrong. When my father was speaking about the firing incidents at noon on that day, the seven-year-old restless child inside me was craving to do something immediately. But some pairs of alert eyes were guarding me. I could not fathom what I should do.

A tremendous restlessness was crushing me from inside. Suddenly I rushed out of the house by evading all eyes, crossed the boundary, and hit the road. Then I ran through the alleyway of Basubazar and reached the road-crossing. There, the rickshaw driver Shukur Mia was sitting in front of the Pathshala (school) of Pandit Jaggeswar. He was waiting for a passenger while sitting on his seat - putting one foot over the other. Without allowing him any time, I immediately punctured the tyre of the rickshaw's right wheel. Shukur Mia gave out a cry. By that time, my mama, one of my cousins and a few other people arrived on the scene. They carried me home by lifting me up on their hands. There was a black rectangular paper on my mama's chest. On it was written, 'We want state language Bangla'. Before my very eyes, that black paper suddenly started to grow in size, became huge, and then covered the entire sky - the whole world. And those words on that paper began to dance before my eyes by becoming incredibly powerful. I then covered my eyes with my two hands. Remaining captive in mama's hands and oscillating on his lap, I was moving towards that small-sized prison of sorts at Number-25 Basubazar Lane.

TWO

I am divulging a small piece of information here. I got it from the repository of my affectionate junior Mujtaba Soud. I express my indebtedness to him for this. The incident was of 1971, when the Pakistani invading forces had swooped on the innocent Bangali Nation with ultra-modern lethal weapons in the darkness of night.

The shooting of a Hindi cinema was in progress at Mumbai then. A few thousand watts of light had illuminated the studio. Some photographers were sitting with their fingers on the shutters of the cameras. The sound-recorder, director, and producer were waiting anxiously. They were in fact waiting breathlessly - when would she arrive? The heroine entered the studio soon afterwards. But she wore no make-up, her face was saddened, and her looks exhibited sorrow, resentment, and vulnerability. She muttered vaguely - 'pack up'. She did not speak to anyone, but only searched for a journalist named Subrata Bandopadhyay. At that time, Mumbai boasted of top-class artistes from the Indian filmdom. The heroine was quite insistent. She informed everyone about the crackdown of the Pakistanis on the innocent-unarmed Bangalis. That heroine who was terribly upset by the news of that dark night, who called on the Indian artistes and technicians of film industry for halting the shooting of cinemas, who made a clarion call to stand by the disaster-struck Bangalis in the face of barbaric assault by the Pakistani forces coupled with most despicable brutality in history was none other than the legendary actress Waheeda Rehman. She was born in this month of February.

Not only Waheeda Rehman, none of the Indian artistes, writers, poets, litterateurs, drama artistes and painters were aloof from this. The whole of India roared out against the horrendous scorching of humanism on that night. The key linkage was their commitment to stand up against any kind of assault on languages and cultures.

Through the language movement of February, the whole of mankind was given a message: There is no alternative to resistance and unity for combating the evil force that acted against mother languages, cultural rights and heritages of humans, the ideals of a nation, and the flourishing of modern consciousness. It is not right to paint the language movement of 1952 as merely a day of protests. Deprivations, exploitations, repression, class conflicts over a long period push mankind to the threshold of eruption. The movement of 1952 was similarly an explosion that was consolidated bit by bit. If we look at the history of mankind, we can realize this truth - a system evolved over time, the empire and emperor arrived, humanity observed the bragging of the powerful. Many ups and downs, ascents and descents occurred over the canvas of time. But even then, the struggles of mankind have prevailed.

THREE

Just as the play 'Hamlet' cannot be staged without the Prince of Denmark, similarly the history of language movement, or the search for the ethos of the Bangali nation, the long struggles, and the history of the Bangali nation's honour cannot be retraced without mentioning the greatest Bangali of all time - Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as that narrative would amount to a denial of history. His life implied the history of Bangalis, the emergence of a nation-state and its annals of struggles, the birth and flourishing of a national ethos on this globe. Therefore, we salute with reverence that massiveness where the amazement of a budding teenager while viewing the sky and the holistic journey of our language movement gets fully dissolved. Joy Bangla.

(The writer is editor of Dainik Jagoran, and chief editor of Dainik Kalbela.)

Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed



PRIME MINISTER  
GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S  
REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH  
08 Falgun 1429  
Message 21 February 2023

On the occasion of the great Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day, I pay my homage to the people of all languages and cultures of the world, including Bengali. UNESCO and Bangladesh have been jointly celebrating this day with due dignity since 2000. This year's theme of the day- 'multilingual education- a necessity to transform education'- which I think is perfect.

The importance of the language movement in the history of the Bengali liberation struggle is immense. The foundation for a non-communal, democratic, language-based state system was laid through this movement. On this day in 1952, Abul Barkat, Abdul Jabbar, Abdus Salam, Rafiquddin Ahmad, Shafiqur Rahman, and many others sacrificed their lives to protect the dignity of our mother language Bengali. I pay my profound respects to the memory of the martyrs of all languages, including Bengali; I remember with deep tribute all the language movement activists, including the Greatest Bangali of all time, the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, whose supreme sacrifices and struggle elevated the esteem of our mother, land, and people.

The glorious history of the language movement of the Bengali from 1947 to 1952 is a source of inspiration in our national life from time and again. The Father of the Nation was repeatedly imprisoned for leading the language movement. At the Education Conference held in Karachi on 27 November 1947, Urdu was decided to be 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 at Dhaka University, used his organizational experience to play a vital role in establishing 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 Bengali 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 movement activists, including Sheikh Mujib, were arrested in front of the Secretariat for leading the strike on 11 March and were released on 15 March. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman led a rally under the historic mango tree at Dhaka University. On 21 March, Jinnah spoke out boastfully in favor of Urdu at the Dhaka Racecourse Ground. While declaring Urdu as 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 an extensive campaign, and addressed in rallies. He was arrested from Faridpur on 11 September 1948 and released on 21 January 1949. He was arrested again on 19 April and released in July. He was detained again on 14 October 1949 and released on 27 February 1952. Sheikh Mujib had been in touch with language movement activists and Chhatra League leaders from 1 January 1950 while in Dhaka Central Jail and had given various suggestions to add momentum to the movement. He sent memos to the three messengers on 3 February 1952 to call for a nationwide strike on 21 February. The jail authorities shifted Sheikh Mujib from Dhaka to Faridpur Jail on 16 February while he went on a hunger strike.

The budgetary session of the East Bengal Executive Council was scheduled on 21 February 1952. Following the advice and instructions of Sheikh Mujib, a general strike was called all over the country on that day. Students violated Section-144, and the police started firing bullets indiscriminately; some lost their lives in the blink of an eye, many were injured, and many were arrested. A strike was observed on 22 February.

In 1956, the Awami League constituted the cabinet, declared Bengali the status of the state language, announced 21 February as Martyr's Day for the first time, declared it a public holiday and took project to construct the Martyr's Monument. Unfortunately, those aspirations were no longer fulfilled with the military takeover on 7 October 1958.

The Father of the Nation in independent Bangladesh directed Bengali in all official activities. He included Bengali as the state language in the constitution. He delivered a speech at the United Nation's 29th General Assembly in Bengali and upheld the dignity of our mother language in the world assembly. During Awami League Government's 1996-2001 term, 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 21 February. UNESCO recognized 21 February as 'International Mother Language Day' on 17 November 1999. We have established the International Mother Language Institute. We have taken initiatives to preserve the world's endangered languages and protect their dignity. We have ensured the use of the Bengali language in the ICT. Since 2017, we have been distributing Braille books for the visually impaired and textbooks in the mother tongues of the ethnic groups free of charge.

Bengali nationalism was established through the language movement. Following the ideals of Bengali nationalism and the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib, we have made Bangladesh a role model for development in the world in the last 14 years. We will transform the country into Smart Bangladesh by 2041- building Smart Citizen, Smart Government, Smart Economy, and Smart Society. In addition, we are also implementing Bangladesh Delta Plan-2100. I firmly believe that we will be able to establish the developed, prosperous, and self-esteemed 'Golden Bangladesh' as the Father of the Nation dreamed.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu  
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

Sheikh Hasina

Wings of Ekushey  
Asad Mannan

We remain in wait for a whole year with so much emotion  
When shall Ekushey arrive - play that song for the nation?  
The song in which motherly affection speaks with river's voice:

In deep embrace with the beauty, fragrance, elixir of heart  
Inside the ethereal soul that exists in the depths of spirit  
Clusters of sound shall coalesce, chain of words will be freed:  
He who has no language is deaf and dumb,  
His eyes don't differentiate between light and dark.

What magical mantra did the pledge of Ekushey have!  
The Bangali a nation of heroes, humanity shines in his blood  
Never bows down to the bragging of rogues and villains -  
Treading the path of Fifty-two - a river of blood in Seventy-one -  
Floated the boat of freedom like the vessel of Noah;  
Just as Rabindranath had filled his boat of gold  
With piles of golden rice, the words' ambrosia of dreams -  
From state to state, from ages to this endless age -  
It echoes even now; and shall echo till eternity!  
The clouds thunder in sky, so many disasters ahead -  
"Where are the youths? Move ahead - the future beckons,  
This perilous storm must be crossed, the boat taken to shore!"  
Bangali! You have no other course open except the boat.

Twenty-first is no more a mere date now -  
It is our lamp of glory lit with the fire of blood;  
Crossing the hurdles of evil on the luminous chariot of this lamp  
The cuckoo is singing while flying with the wings of Ekushey:  
Ekush is the jewel on my head, Ekush is my necklace,  
Today I give this gift of Ekushey to the entire world.

Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed