

Honouring the martyrs of 1952

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"Amar Bhaier Rokte Rangano Ekushey February Ami Ki Bhulitey Pari..."

The song that epitomises Amar Ekushey not only has a special place in the hearts of Bangalees, it also lifts their spirits.

Humming the tune, thousands of people from all walks of life thronged the capital's Central Shaheed Minar and elsewhere to pay homage to the Language Movement heroes yesterday.

Bare-footed and holding flowers, they wore black and white to honour the supreme sacrifice.

The Shaheed Minar premises, adorned in different colours, wore a festive look with street paintings and graffiti in Bangla alphabets and selected verses about mother language on the walls.

Programmes including discussions and cultural sessions nationwide and in Bangladesh missions abroad reminisced the sacrifice made by Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Jabbar, Shafique and others, according to messages received yesterday.

The day is being observed worldwide as the Unesco in 1999, declared February 21 as International Mother Language Day.

On February 21, 1952, students and people from all walks of life took to the streets in Dhaka to protest the then Pakistan government's refusal to recognise Bangla as one of the state languages and imposition of Urdu as the only official language of Pakistan.

Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Shafiur, Jabbar and a few others were killed when police opened fire on their procession.

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PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON, ANISUR RAHMAN

AGLOW WITH EKUSHEY SPIRIT. Wearing black and white and holding flowers, people of all strata of life thronged the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka to pay homage to the Language Movement heroes yesterday. Imbued with the Amar Ekushey spirit, children along with their parents, and students walked barefoot towards the Shaheed Minar, adorned with flowers, to pay their respect.



CHURIHATTA FIRE TRAGEDY

Wahed Mansion repaired VICTIMS FORGOTTEN



Wahed Mansion now.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



The damaged building after the fire.



Victims demand justice. PHOTO: STAR

SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL and EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

Wahed Mansion in Old Dhaka's Chawkbazar has been repainted, plastered, and restored to its former state. The owners have moved on, and it seems the country has too.

But for the families of the 71 victims who perished in the fire that tore through the building on February 20, 2019, time has done little to heal their wounds. Their lives remain physically, emotionally, and financially scarred.

The fire was fuelled by flammable chemicals stored illegally inside the building, devastated the Churihatta neighbourhood.

Today, the building's pristine facade belies the tragedy that unfolded there.

"The four-storey building has been repaired, but our suffering never ended," said Ashiq Uddin Sainik, general secretary of a collective of victims' families.

STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE

Sheikh Mahmud, one of the few who survived the inferno, bears the physical reminders of that night.

"The backside of my body was badly burned. I was one of the lucky ones, but the pain still lingers," he said. "One of my eyes has permanent damage."

For others, the suffering is financial as well as emotional.

Shirin Akter lost her husband, Nuruzzaman Howlader, a rickshaw-puller who never made it out of the fire. Now, she works as a cleaner for Dhaka

South City Corporation, earning Tk 500 on the days she is assigned work.

"The job helps me survive, but it's not enough to support my son and me. I can hardly make ends meet," she said.

Nasreen Akter, daughter of deceased Jaynal Abedin, said, "Five years have passed, and we still haven't received justice."

"Every year, people ask us about our sufferings, but nothing changes. My mother is battling cancer and kidney problems, and we are struggling to survive," she added.

COMPENSATION PROMISED, BUT UNDELIVERED

To mark the fifth anniversary of the tragedy, victims' families organised a rally in front of Wahed Mansion yesterday, demanding justice and financial relief.

The government had reportedly raised Tk 30 crore in the national relief fund for the victims, but none of the families claim to have received a single taka.

While compensation was promised, only 21 of the 71 families who lost loved ones have received any financial support. The rest remain in limbo.

Nasiruddin, a leader of the victims' collective, said, "We have heard that a large fund was collected for us, but we have yet to see any of it. We need that money – or at least a loan – to help us rebuild our lives."

JUSTICE DELAYED, HOPE FADING
As the years pass, hope for justice is fading.

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Concert 'Rebuilding the Nation' postponed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The concert titled "Rebuilding the Nation", organised under the banner of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, has been postponed. The organisers confirmed the postponement on Thursday night.

The concert was originally set to take place on February 22 at the old Trade Fair Ground in Agargaon, Dhaka. The organisers cited security concerns, but no further details regarding a rescheduled date have been disclosed.

Salahuddin Sourav, the cultural cell secretary of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, told Prothom Alo, "The concert has been postponed due to security concerns. The safety of participants, audience members, and all involved is our top priority. Given the circumstances, we have made this decision. Everything was ready,

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JUDICIARY REFORM

Commission for fair probe, attorney services

Says it will ensure proper
prosecution of criminal cases

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The Judiciary Reform Commission has proposed the formation of a separate Independent Criminal Investigation Service and a permanent Government Attorney Service to ensure proper investigations and prosecution of criminal cases.

"The absence of a permanent attorney service and an independent criminal investigation service is a key reason for the low conviction rate in Bangladesh. Therefore, the commission proposes their establishment," the commission said in its final report, submitted to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on February 5.

The report said investigation is a crucial step in the criminal justice system, as the speed, nature, and outcome of cases depend on it.

It points out deficiencies such as lack of professionalism, inadequate tools, and ineffective evidence collection, which weaken the investigation process.

Bias and delays in submitting reports further contribute to the acquittal of accused individuals in most criminal cases.

The commission also said false cases and misuse of police forces for political harassment are common. Corruption within the police, along with institutional weaknesses and lack of public trust, exacerbates the problem.

Additionally, there is no dedicated unit for investigations, leading to inefficiencies in the current system, it said.

To address these issues, the commission recommends creating a Criminal Investigation Service, separate from the police force.

This service will have its own recruitment process, budget, and institutional framework. It will operate at the thana, district, division, and central levels.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Set up permanent attorney service
- Improve investigation standards
- Curb police corruption
- Place probe service under home ministry
- Set attorney retirement age at 65

A director general will oversee the service, with officers appointed as necessary. Police officers absorbed into this service will not be transferred back to the police department.

The Criminal Investigation Service will be supervised by the home ministry, with its head office in Dhaka.

Regarding the Permanent Attorney

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People will resist if fascism emerges again Says Rizvi

UNB, Dhaka

People will again take to the streets if any fascism or dictatorship arises, said BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday.

"The spirit of Ekushey February is an indelible consciousness that will never fade. If fascism or any form of dictatorship arises again, the spirit of February 21 will inspire the youth and the people of this country to take to the streets in protest," he said.

He made the remarks while talking to the media after placing a wreath in honour of the Language Movement martyrs at the Central Shaheed Minar.

He said, "Whenever we found ourselves under the grip of a dictatorship, '52 inspired us, urging us to fight against tyranny. Over the past 17 years, we fought tirelessly; many leaders and activists disappeared, and many were killed in crossfire. Finally, the people led by the youth emerged victorious, forcing the oppressive, corrupt government to flee."

Rizvi also said holding a free and fair election is

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A child excitedly looks at a book at a stall. Large crowds descended on the Ekushey Boi Mela yesterday on the occasion of February 21. Suhrawardy Udyan remained bustling throughout the day as more visitors poured into the fair. Since yesterday was a weekend, the "children's hour" drew an even larger number of young readers, many accompanied by their parents.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

