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Message
PRESIDENT
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
BANGABHABAN, DHAKA
8 Falgun 1432
21 February 2026

Message

Today, on 21 February, we observe Great Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day. On this solemn and historic occasion, I pay my deepest respects to the language martyrs, Rafiq, Salam, Barkat, Jabbar, Shafiq, and all the unnamed heroes who laid down their lives to secure the right to Bangla as our mother tongue.

On International Mother Language Day 2026, I extend my heartfelt greetings and congratulations to the people and ethnic communities of Bangladesh and to speakers of diverse languages around the world.

The historic Language Movement stands as a glorious chapter in the history of our emergence. In the aftermath of the Partition of 1947, despite the distinct linguistic and cultural identities of the two parts of Pakistan, the then ruling authorities declared Urdu as the sole state language. This unjust attempt to suppress the mother tongue awakened a profound national resolve, as students and citizens of erstwhile East Pakistan, today's Bangladesh, rose in solemn defiance. Through supreme sacrifice, they secured the right to their mother tongue, giving birth to our distinct national consciousness. The Language Movement was, in essence, a struggle to safeguard our national identity, individuality, and cultural uniqueness. It was the spirit of Ekushey that infused our movements for self-determination, our liberation struggle, and our War of Independence with boundless inspiration and unwavering courage.

In 1999, Martyrs' Day was accorded international recognition as International Mother Language Day, a moment of profound pride for our nation. Today, the spirit of Ekushey continues to serve as a constant source of inspiration for people across the world in safeguarding their own languages and cultures.

Language is the foremost custodian and carrier of a nation's existence, heritage, and culture. As Bangla was earned through immeasurable sacrifice and the sacred blood of martyrs, we must be ever more mindful in its proper practice and in preserving its quality and dignity. At the same time, to progress in harmony with the advanced world, we must develop proficiency in internationally recognized languages alongside Bangla. I am confident that the observance of International Mother Language Day will contribute meaningfully to build a prosperous nation while shaping a sustainable future. May the spirit of Ekushey foster mutual respect among people of different languages and cultures across the world and ensure the welfare of our country and nation. On this Great Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day, this is my earnest hope.

Mohammed Shahabuddin

The Language Movement-based Play 'Kabor': Politicism and State-Vision
Professor Mohammad Azam

A proof of the profound impact of Language Movement as a component of nationalism was the stir it generated in the domain of art. Essays on the subject were written even earlier. Following the occurrence of Ekushey February, its shadow started to fall in diverse ways on plays, poems, songs, and films. The 21-point programme during the 1954-election bore testimony to its huge influence in national politics. It was evident that many points in that manifesto emanated directly or indirectly from the Language Movement, as a result of which it became part of the national ethos overnight. It was therefore no surprise that it would find multidimensional reflection in literature.

Literary manifestation of any event, history, or political activity usually touches some additional aspects. Intimate revelation of persons and groups takes place in literature in the context of structural reality. On the other hand, the whole process happens inside the repository of language, which is the principal mode of expression in the lived life of a linguistic group. The language of literature is closely related to its overall shape or form. It is very difficult to generate the intimate nature of lived life of structurally incorporated individuals and groups in this repository of form in history and most areas of social science. The allusions or interpretations of language are natural. Based on this, it is possible to shed light on the intimate corners of human lives. On the other hand, the indications of future and the map of aspiration can be drawn on the foldings of present-time.

We shall now explore some intimate pictures of politicisation and state-vision during the Language Movement depicted in the play 'Kabor' (1953) of Munier Choudhury based on the above-mentioned theoretical framework. The play has been widely read and analysed because of its obvious merits. The popularity and credibility of this text have special importance in the context of the nationalistic narrative active behind the emergence of Bangladesh state. The popularity of this play proves that the language movement presented here carries much of the mainstream narrative. However, a nationalistic narrative usually moves at an upper level and gathers its convenient ingredients from the comparatively visible layers. The popular nationalistic narrative usually does not seek to reach the subtle layers of lived life, where literary language and vision become active.

The play 'Kabor' was written in 1953, just one year after the Language Movement of 1952. At that time, the heat of the immediate aftermath of that incident and tendencies cum propensity of collective psyche were still fresh. The incidents of the decade of the 1960s that consolidated the nationalistic movement, struggle and stance were unimaginable at the start of 1950s. In this situation, drawing of this mold cum trend regarding the immediate-past experiences of language movement in the play 'Kabor' did not evolve from the weight of any nationalistic movement. In that respect, the testimony of this text is most likely to be more reliable even compared to data and available information in some cases.

There is limited scope in the play 'Kabor' to display the political activities that we are ordinarily acquainted with. However, the whole episode of Ekushey February has been expertly presented in brief by the playwright between the scenes staged at the graveyard. Therefore, although indirectly, the political



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PRIME MINISTER
GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
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On the occasion of Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day, I extend my heartfelt greetings and warm felicitations to all people and linguistic communities across the world, including the speakers of our mother tongue, Bangla. On this solemn day, I pay profound tribute to the martyrs of the Language Movement of 1952, whose supreme sacrifice secured the rightful status and dignity of Bangla as our mother language.

Ekushey February stands as an indelible chapter in our national history. On this day in 1952, Abul Barkat, Abdu Salam, Rafiq Uddin Ahmed, Abdul Jabbar, and many others embraced martyrdom in their struggle to uphold the honour of Bangla. Their sacrifice marked the first decisive step toward the liberation of the then East Bengal from prolonged domination and oppression. The Language Movement not only established the right to our mother tongue but also laid a strong foundation for national essence of sovereignty based on a unifying language, democratic aspirations, and cultural identity. The historic path forged through the sacrifices of Ekushey ultimately culminated in our independence through the Great Liberation War and the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation.

Bangla remains the principal vehicle of our identity and heritage. In recognition of our profound sacrifice and enduring devotion to our mother language, UNESCO declared 21 February as 'International Mother Language Day.' Today, the spirit of Ekushey has evolved into a global movement dedicated to safeguarding linguistic diversity and promoting the equal dignity of all languages.

The core ideals of Ekushey were the establishment of democratic values, the protection of people's rights, and the affirmation of equality. Upholding that spirit through long years of struggle, democracy has been re-established in the country. The present government remains firmly committed to consolidating and advancing this democratic journey. We honour the Language Martyrs, the heroes of 1971, the brave souls of the 2024 mass uprising, and all who have sacrificed for democracy in our nation's glorious history. To uphold their sacrifices and legacy, we must build a stable, secure, and humane democratic state, where independence is protected, institutions are accountable, and the people remain the ultimate source of power.

On this significant day, I call upon all concerned to work collectively to uphold and protect the dignity of languages worldwide. Let us preserve the linguistic diversity within our country, safeguard our unique culture and heritage, and ensure the proper use and cultivation of Bangla at all levels.

I pray for the eternal peace of all language martyrs.

I wish every success to the programmes undertaken in observance of Martyrs' Day and International Mother Language Day.

Tarique Rahman

The Language Movement-based Play 'Kabor': Politicism and State-Vision

programme, its implementation and the actions of the state against it could be gathered fully. The state was portrayed here as a monster having expertise in perpetrating repression. When Hafiz says, "Not many corpses, I could bury all of those alone by clearing the place" - the fang and claw of a terribly repressive state-structure get exposed. This design of the state comes to the fore repeatedly through direct utterances of the leader and the attitude cum pronouncements of Hafiz.

The programmes of the agitators were stated indirectly, and the incidents of Twenty-first February were presented in diverse dimensions. However, the repeated pronouncements of an activity of repressed people through mainly the dialogues of the leader raised it to the level of symbolic prestige. It was called 'procession'. On hearing about commotion from the mouth of Hafiz, the leader was instantly reminded about procession. Procession was the only language of protests and resistance that caught his imagination quickly and easily. He asked Hafiz: "Commotion? Have the corpses of the graveyard learned to bring out procession as well?" Therefore, the chief objective for carrying out procession on his part became halting of procession. In his hallucination, he prescribes the same medication for Murda Fakir, who appears as a conscientious character: "Bury him. Ten-fifteen, twenty-twenty-five yards - as deep as you can.... So that he cannot bring out procession and raise slogan, so that he forgets to shout."

In this way, the play 'Kabor' makes procession an effective symbol of programmes. During the subsequent period of the Pakistani era, procession became the principal indicator of political activities. 'Onkar' (1975) written by Ahmed Sofa, or the novel 'Chilekothar Sepai' (1986) by Akhteruzzaman Elias, or the unforgettable organization of processions during the mass upsurge of 1969 in Shamsur Rahman's poems remind us about that.

However, if we leave the manifestation level of programmes and activities and enter the comparative-theory level of politicisation, then we can observe various dimensions of ideological stance and conflict. In fact, state-vision can be arrived at from an ideological review - where the state, at least in the text under discussion, was a pointer to the future.

When the leader says, "Fear could never enter my mind during the past four-five years", then it becomes clear that the post-1947 state-structure of Pakistan was governed undemocratically by executives isolated from the people, who remained beyond people's representation. This state-structure becomes evident even more clearly when the leader is heard to say, "They are my trusted people. That kind of people could not be obtained even after searching your whole office". It could be understood that the state was being run based on "patron-client" relationship of "trusted" people, not based on structural stability, or well-regulated bureaucracy and police administration. In whatever way the meaning of the word 'modern' may be interpreted, this kind of structure can never be placed inside any of its compartments. Naturally, the state-system portrayed in the play 'Kabor' did not possess the slightest of ingredients that find place in the modern state-structure based on well-regulated separation of state-organs. Only in this kind of state-framework is it possible for a leader to utter, "Don't worry about money. Please spend more than what is needed. I shall obtain approval from the government." This kind of pronouncement not only demonstrates an undisciplined state-system that is devoid of morality or ethics, it also speaks about a regressive state, a state-structure that cannot differentiate between party politics and legal executive power.

Jinnah was widely mirrored in the framing of the leader-character. "I could not have become the leader of such a large institution if I was nervous about doing these tasks" - this dialogue of the leader clearly points to the leadership position of the ruling party. This has been more openly spelled out at another place. While subjugating the reckless youth that emerged from the grave, the leader said: "See boy, my age has advanced. Even your elders obey me. I have built and given shape to this country's politics over many years. You can say, I am the sole proprietor of the largest political institution of this nation! Millions of people rise and sit at my command -". In the backdrop of the reality prevailing in the then Pakistan - despite the mimicry and satirical inclination of these words - they could be uttered by Jinnah alone. However, Jinnah had expired long before the happenings of Ekushey February. In this backdrop, this dialogue could only refer to the state of Pakistan.

Whatever Jinnah might have been in the context of history, the leader built in his image in the play 'Kabor' is undoubtedly a deceptive character. And the state itself also symbolised visible injustices. Here, the leader, the administration and the state worked together unlawfully. This identity of the Pakistani state has been constructed or depicted many times in the history and literature of Bangladesh. The 'Kabor' is probably its oldest sample. A converse state-form was articulated in this play mainly through the pronouncements of Murda Fakir and the martyrs. Those certainly referred to a democratic, tolerant, and welfare-seeking country.

The playwright has presented the most effective ideological discourse of this play through Murda Fakir. The aspirational truth of politicisation was established by changing the prevalent meaning of the two words 'living' and 'dead'. The leader also considered Hafiz as a dead person who created disturbance by living unjustly and through capturing the higher seats of power-relations. On the other hand, Murda Fakir said that the dead people who went to the grave by embracing the smell of fresh gun-powder would not remain there at any cost. However secretly and to whatever depth they might have been trafficked to, they would come out by piercing the soil and establish a new dawn and a new state.

In other words, the ideological strength and disseminative excellence of the demands that were aligned with the masses and emanated from the deep sense of human justice were irresistible. Therefore, its success in the state-system of the future was also most desirable. In this way, the play 'Kabor' depicted the modern, democratic and bourgeois ideals prevailing during the decades of 1940s and 1950s of Twentieth Century. Murda Fakir said, those who died were in fact alive. It only reflected the desire for a bourgeois state against that of a worn-out one prevailing at that juncture.

A politically sensitive area in the play 'Kabor' was religion. That was not only because the Pakistani state was established on the basis of religion, but also because the state was gradually striving to establish religion as the sole 'ideological state-apparatus'. In this situation, it was almost impossible to frame a meaningful critique about the Pakistani state without challenging this pseudo-ideological narrative. On the other hand, stringent attention had to be paid so that religiosity in public life and genuine ideological narrative of religion were not harmed by it.

The humour and satire applied in the play very much touched the leading-actors of state-power. Clearly, drinking was a key art and technique of the drama. It implied that collective hallucination could materialise for two persons only through drinking incredible quantities of wine. But as a bonus, continuous drinking also gave rise to other dimensions. The drunk state of the leader of a country who used or misused Islam as an ideological weapon for governance undoubtedly created a comic atmosphere on the stage. As a police-administrator, Hafiz was also not outside it.

However, the playwright did not hesitate a bit to bring to the fore the hypocrisy inherent in the professed state-ideology of the Pakistani state. He did this first through the grave-diggers, who were uneducated but well-convertant in religious knowledge. They raised question about the right of the dead in performing religious ritual. Clearly, the state-system did not agree to grant that right. In addition, there was no sign that indicated they

considered the matter to be very serious, but could not move in that direction because of prevailing circumstances. The proposal of Inspector Hafiz - "Dump all the corpses together after digging a big hole and then fill it up with soil" - and the enthusiastic support extended to it by the leader brings to the fore their irreligious and immoral stances. It may be mentioned that those involved in the funeral of the dead were also a decisive class in the play 'Raktakto Prantor' of Munier Choudhury. However, similar to that drama, this class took refuge here in universal human rights by abandoning the uniform of religion. It can be said that secularisation of religiosity took place in this way; and it was possible to criticize the Pakistani state by applying the scale of humanism.

Next comes the character of Murda Fakir. It undoubtedly represented the desired position of the writer, who was of a conscientious type. While describing his identity, Hafiz said, "The person is more or less an educated one. He is a good Alem..." The use of the word 'Alem' or 'religious scholar' for identifying Murda Fakir was not at all urgent. Clearly, this word created another class who were against the use of religion by the state-side as an ideological parlance; where the natural idealism of religion was preserved, humanistic standpoint was protected. In this way, it indirectly maintained conformity with the democratic bourgeois politics.

An aspect of the linguistic significance expressed through the play's dialogues was that, standard Bangla was established as the language of the modern and progressive youths. Against the Farsi-Arabic and feudal-smelling language of the leader and Hafiz, the words and language of Murda Fakir and the martyred youths, and the relentless application of standard Bangla without any exception in building linguistic form undoubtedly reinforced this significance. Let us demonstrate the use of words and ideological expression of linguistic form by quoting two dialogues from Hafiz.



In response to lamentations of the leader regarding death of faithful people, Hafiz said: "They are all sons of bitches. They want to elicit salary as something due to them, not as a benefit given to them." Again, while supporting the argument in favour of bringing an odd-person like the guard for the secret mission at night, he said: "There are some tasks, Sir, which should not be unveiled even in front of the wife." The external features of word-form in both these dialogues are very clear. But at a deeper level, the relevant discourse appears beside applied words with news about the inner realm of politicisation and state-vision. Let us consider the word 'benefit' in the first dialogue. The typology of interpersonal relationship that the word suggests is undoubtedly pre-modern; and because it was used with regard to the relationship between the state and the citizen, and as it came out of the mouth of a police officer, it became an indicator of the state itself. In the second dialogue, the words 'wife' and 'unveil' are quite heavy in terms of cultural messaging; even if they were

not unmodern, they were not at all universal. But the captured message in the inner-structure of the dialogue was even more pathetic. The expression was not aimed at maintenance of special secrecy in the working of the state; rather, it was a self-confession about an unlawful task. It is notable that these types of words were absent in the dialogues of the dead youth and Murda Fakir; and even if similar words were present, they were certainly not used by attaching similar significance.

Humayun Azad had noted that the principal significance of Ekushey was the purification of Bangla language in Bangladesh. However problematic this narrative may be with regard to the potentials for autocracy in linguistic form, the above-mentioned linguistic spirit of the play 'Kabor' fully condones Azad's claims.

However, in that case, problem arises at another spot. The regional Bangla dialect spoken by the guard in his dialogue as representative of the lower-class in the play creates an opportunity for deeper 'otherisation'. This kind of language-selection cannot be explained merely by emphasizing on upholding reality. Because, selecting simple spoken Bangla of ordinary citizens by a guard working in the civic domain (at least by omitting bookish words and style) could not have been unnatural at all. No doubt, this language-form used in the guard's dialogue was adopted to create diversity on the one hand, and to generate humour on the other. This selection was therefore quite effective in presenting diverse humour and comic relief. But it also created a big opportunity for 'otherisation' in that state by lower-class people, as 'standard' Bangla was established in the projected state as a symbolic feature.

In fact, this problem existed in many obsessions of 1952-centred state-project, which became established in nationalistic narratives or creative practices. It is true that there were working-class participants at some places of the Ekushey Movement. But because of the dominating influence of educated middle-class citizens, the workers or lower-class people were not even heard as a parallel voice, let alone as a high-pitched one. In fact, those who are referred to as ordinary or common people had joined the Ekushey and other subsequent movements. But the dreams, aspirations or interests of those ordinary people never became bigger. Therefore, Ekushey has given us a cluster of middle-class spirit. This has been a long-term problem in terms of state-vision, which has not been addressed properly by the Bangladesh state even after independence.

The reality of power-relations is especially noticeable in the play 'Kabor'. Elderly people were supposed to be present directly or indirectly as backers of youths - mainly students - who had engaged in a ferocious struggle against support them; but there is no such indication anywhere in this play. For this reason, there were two parties in the whole episode, and a binary narrative comprising devil and angel was created for evaluating it. This kind of division can be done with such certainty only when a state-structure is negated along with its ideological base. This is not possible in bourgeois, or liberal, or democratic political dispensation. Although the projected state-ideal in the play 'Kabor' was undoubtedly 'liberal-democratic', but it appears from its outline of political activities that the left-leaning ideology of Munier Chowdhury played a major role, consciously or unconsciously, in the framing of that outline.

The circumstances, data and facts support this conjecture. The communist movement was not only banned in the Pakistani state, it was also deemed to be the principal one among the most notable enemies of the state. The leftist leaders and activists therefore widely participated in all the movements - whether nationalistic or emanating from group-centred dissatisfaction - by considering the state-system as its adversary. The massive participation and leadership role of the leftists in the 1952-movement have been acknowledged universally as a historical fact. The government itself publicised it as the work of 'Communists and Indian Agents'. Munier Choudhury's essays titled 'Naughty Boy' and 'Fit Column' depicted the reality of repression suffered by youths at the hands of the state and the guardians of society. While presenting the identity of an agitator of Ekushey in the play 'Kabor', the leader clearly noted: "You did not want to obey the country's law when alive. Even after death, you now seek to disregard the rules of the after-life. You are possessed by the ghost of communism; therefore, you do not want to go to the grave now even after death."

As the language movement was the most influential incident in post-1947 period and the most decisive one in determining the political direction, some basic ideas about politics, politicisation and state-vision of that time have been narrated in this movement-centred literary work. The picture of a repressed people fighting a repressive state was mainly obtained through this.

The absence of a modern, democratic and humane entity becomes prime in the image of a repressive state drawn by this text. The sensitivities observed among the masses struggling against the state can be termed as the ideals of a democratic-bourgeois state. Therefore, although it was not directly mentioned by party-organisations or programmes, the projected state could be identified through this branding.

However, dependence on the middle-class, especially the students in this movement and struggle indicated an indelible deficit. Besides, this play has also not proposed any satisfactory compromise between the aspirations of the leftists and supporters of bourgeois democracy. Rather, it induces the readers to believe that the leftists in Pakistan, who were forced to pursue political activities in secrecy, participated and led 'anti-state' programmes in their own way. However, the tremendous nationalistic pull in overall sentiment and language ultimately forced them to adopt a nationalistic posture in both size and shape. The writer also does not raise much objection to that. One of the proofs for that is: the play used the term 'mother's language' by avoiding the comparatively subtle points in the demand for 'state-language'; and the term 'mother's son' was highlighted as the main target of state repression. However diverse the demands of the Ekushey Movement might have been, however expansive it might have been in the social and political horizon, not a single moment elapsed in making the nationalistic tune of East Bengal its prime component. The play 'Kabor' bears testimony to that very deeply.

(The writer is a professor of Bangla department at the University of Dhaka, now serving on deputation as Director General of Bangla Academy)

Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed

Verses of Ekushey
Hasan Hafiz

In consciousness is it fountain of light
In cyclone or gusty storm
It lives forever
Burns with resolute valour.

Paying with blood's high price
The soul gets language
It is the nectar of vitality,
Shows the path in darkness
The stones of regression
Erode unceasingly,
The infinite glory of Ekushey

Speaks
With flowers
Respect and
Love,
Free soul till eternity
Sky-piercing martyrs' monument...

On blood-drenched highway
The impeccable simile of rose
Fuming in protest,
The habitat was dormant
Immortal sons of
The climate and soil,
The people
Rose up in protest

Not only for language
But in the spirit of freedom
Sharp, polished
Thunder-flowers bloom,
The conspiracies
Vicious and crooked
Repression, tortures
Washed away by blood-stream
In revolt and cataclysm,
Drawn with sun's alphabet
Resolute and courageous
The faces of martyrs.

Climbing the steps of Fifty-two
Sixty-nine, Seventy-one
After the tumultuous Ninety
Again Twenty-four -
The sequence in that order -
Inspiration's enduring provender.

Translation: Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed