

Education in Bangla key to intellectual growth

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Speakers tell discussion



Prof Salimullah Khan speaks at a seminar titled 'Bangladesh's Culture and Contemporary Bangladesh' at Khulna Press Club auditorium yesterday.
Photo: Star

Education must begin in the mother tongue if a nation wants to preserve its cultural identity and develop a meaningful intellectual tradition, speakers said at a seminar on Friday.

Citing Abul Mansur Ahmad, they said the 1952 Language Movement was a "revolution" whose core message was national selfhood, something impossible without literature in the mother language.

Delivering the keynote speech, Prof Salimullah Khan criticised the absence of Bangla in the higher judiciary even after 50 years of independence.

He said remnants of colonial rule had created a "stagnation of speed and memory", deepening English dependency among the elite.

"How long will this continue? Even after 50 years of independence, the trend of sending children to English-medium schools is stronger than ever," he said.

He questioned the need to introduce English at the preschool level. "If you want to improve the quality of education, you must start with Bangla," he said at the seminar, titled "Bangladesh's Culture and Contemporary Bangladesh", held at Khulna Press Club auditorium.

While acknowledging the lack of English textbooks in higher education, he questioned why early-grade Bangla books are still not prioritised.

"Teach ten languages if you want, but denying a child education in their own language is depriving them -- and deceiving the nation," he said.

Citing Abul Mansur Ahmad, he said education cannot be separated from politics. "Education is too important to be left only to educators. Students, guardians and society must all be involved."

He argued that a society that cannot educate its children and teachers in its own language, yet insists on English-medium kindergarten education, "cannot be called civilised, though it may have its own culture".

He also said Abul Mansur Ahmad wrote with such clarity that one could easily agree or disagree with him. "But many modern writers are so unclear that it is difficult even to understand what they mean."

At the event, The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam thanked everyone present. He expressed special gratitude to the teachers and students of Khulna University.

He also urged everyone to read the works of Abul Mansur Ahmad.

Poet Imran Mahfuz said the Abul Mansur Ahmad Memorial Council has identified 52 young scholars in seven years through competitions and seminars to introduce his ideas to new generations.

In his welcome remarks, writer and teacher Abul Fazal said although "British Bengal" was divided in 1947, "historical Bengal -- and its culture -- was not."

Dr Abdullah Harun Chowdhury, professor of Environmental Science at Khulna University, chaired the event.